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The Eastern Question Association.

PAPERS ON THE EASTERN QUESTION.

No. 9.

TURKISH RULE

IN

CRETE.

BY

J. HILARY SKINNER, Esq.,

AUTHOR OF "ROUGHING IT IN CRETE."

PUBLISHED FOR THE EASTERN QUESTION ASSOCIATION,

28, CANADA BUILDING, WESTMINSTER;

BY

CASSELL PETTER & GALPIN,

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TURKISH RULE IN CRETE.

THE island of Crete, or Candia, offers an example of the blighting effect of continued misgovernment and oppression, which may be profitably studied at the present time. It is an island both picturesque and fertile, with a splendid climate and with great natural advantages. The production of wine and of olives in Crete might be enormous under favourable economic conditions, whilst there is pasturage on the mountain-sides for numerous flocks and herds, and the mulberry flourishes so luxuriantly in some of the Cretan valleys that a considerable amount of silk might be annually produced with a very small outlay of capital. All this fair scene, from the rugged mountain-tops to the beautiful sea-shore, appears destined by Nature to be a garden of delight and plenty in the southernmost corner of Southern Europe. But the curse of Turkish rule has been upon it for a couple of centuries, and Crete has been blighted and impoverished year by year, instead of making any onward progress, however slow.

Most Englishmen have an idea that Crete was involved in the ruin of the Byzantine Empire, when Mahomet II. conquered Constantinople in 1453. The island had, however, passed under Venetian rule long before the fall of the Greek capital, and for two hundred years after that event it was bravely defended by the Venetians against every effort of the Turks to obtain possession of so rich a prize. There was no great cordiality between the Cretans, who were orthodox Greeks in faith, and the Venetians, who were zealous Romanists. But the vigorous rule of the Italian Republic was a blessing and a protection to the islanders, compared with what they were afterwards to endure. They were at least safe from wholesale massacre and ruin whilst the Lion of St. Mark could hold at bay the fiery hordes of Islam. Trade and agriculture flourished; the villages were large and prosperous, and there were many pleasant villas, built in the more fertile valleys, whose ruins still attest the comfort and luxury of that bygone time. It is not positively known how large was the population of Crete in the most flourishing days of the Byzantine Empire. Some authorities suppose it to have reached as high a figure as a million

and a half; whilst others doubt whether the island ever contained more than a million inhabitants. This was the approximate number of the Cretans under Venetian rule, when the island was certainly very prosperous, and there is no reason to suppose that its population had greatly diminished up to that period. A million of people then were saved from Turkish misgovernment so long as Venice could retain her hold upon Crete. They were in a dangerous position, these islanders, in the very corner of Europe; with a threatening cloud of Asiatic barbarism ever hanging on their eastern horizon, and with the strong hands that had once been so well able to defend them growing feebler as years passed by.

It was just a century after the battle of Lepanto that the fatal moment arrived for Crete of Turkish conquest. In 1669 the city of Candia, the Sebastopol of its day, was taken by the Turks after a desperate and protracted defence, in which the Venetians were aided by five thousand Frenchmen, and in which prodigies of valour are reported as being performed on both sides. The Turks, who were in overwhelming force, fired about two hundred thousand shot and shell into the town, and the besieged garrison made several sorties to drive the besiegers from their works. So great a siege excited interest throughout Europe: "Candia" was a word on every lip, and had not the Western nations been too much pre-occupied by their own quarrels and jealousies, some effectual help would doubtless have been sent to prevent the conquest of Crete. As it was, the Cretans were warmly pitied and sympathised with by many who could afford them no material aid. The black cloud that had so long been threatening their island had now settled upon them in terrible earnest, and they disappeared from the European family as completely as though they had been the leeward vessel of some squadron upon a dangerous coast, which went ashore and perished with all hands. The island was overrun from end to end. Some villages were plundered and burned, others were spared for a heavy ransom. Thousands of prisoners were carried away to Asia Minor to be sold as slaves. In a word, the Turks were victorious, and used their victory after their own fashion. But they displayed, besides courage and ferocity, a gleam of that talent for taking root among a conquered people and using the converts to Mahometanism to keep down the unconverted Giaours, which had given them so strong a hold upon Bosnia, Albania, and other provinces. Very few Osmanlis, or genuine Turks, ever settled in Crete. Those who did so were absorbed by the Mussulman population, of Greek origin, and the language of the island remained entirely Greek, save for a few devotional phrases adopted by the converts to Islam, and for a smattering of Turkish picked up from the soldiers in the fortified towns. But the "Cretan Turks," though they spoke the language of their Christian neighbours,

and followed the same pursuits, and wore a similar costume, were elevated to the dignity of a separate caste by the fact of their religious belief. They stalked through the Christian villages as lords and masters against whom no one dared to raise a hand, whatever their conduct might be; for behind the local minority of "True Believers" was the irresistible force of the great Mahometan Empire, which would stick at no cruelty, however revolting, which would shrink from no infamy, however disgusting, to stamp out a spirit of rebellion. The Christians had nothing for it but to bear their hard lot as best they could, and try to live on terms of something like mutual understanding with their tyrannical countrymen, whilst the Turkish Pashas made use of these last as scouts and skirmishers to maintain their ascendency among the mountains. It was from Constantinople that all political authority came. The Cretan Turks themselves, though favoured on account of their religion, and made useful, as above described, by the dominant race, were mere worthless provincials in the eyes of their rulers. The haughty governor, whose nod was a signal of ruin or prosperity to those beneath him; the garrison of foreign soldiers to support his sway; the judges and the higher functionaries of every sort, were Osmanli Turks. The Turkish language was used in the courts of justice and in all official acts, though scarcely any one could understand it. Far from trying to improve the resources of the country, or from spending any of its revenues upon public works, the sole aim of Turkish administration was to squeeze as much money as possible out of the Cretans in a given time. A Pasha who was wise in his generation might soon make a comfortable fortune, which he could spend on the shores of the Bosphorus when his rivals should have procured his recall. Whilst as to improvement of the island, it was, indeed, a thankless task. There were no administrative traditions in that direction. The next Governor would be sure to undo whatever little good had been done, and the people, if suspected of having enriched themselves, would only be the fitter subjects for future extortion.

We can understand the position of modern Crete all the better by following thus briefly the decline from Venetian protection, with some exactions and many bickerings, to Turkish conquest with the dead weight of its senseless tyranny. It is not surprising that trade and population steadily declined under such a system as that of the Turks. Instead of a million of inhabitants—the number which Crete is supposed to have contained in the middle of the seventeenth century—there were less than three hundred thousand Cretans, Mussulman and Christian, by the beginning of the nineteenth century. Such roads as there had formerly been, were now almost impassable, nothing having been done to keep them in order; and the half-ruined villages, with traces of more habitations than could now be occupied, showed how woefully the

numbers of the people had shrunk. It was idle to dream of change or improvement with such a dominant race as the Constantinopolitan Turks. Those were not days of sham constitutions and of promises made to be broken, but of downright old-fashioned despotism, of the "Off with his head!—So much for Buckingham!" kind, and a Christian dog who did not do as he was bid took his chance of death or mutilation. Only a few of the most inaccessible villages, like those of the Sphakiotes, for example, in Western Crete, enjoyed a rough immunity from constant oppression, through the difficulty of getting at them and the danger of driving their inhabitants to despair. The rest of the Cretans were duly squeezed and harried by one Pasha after another, until Turkish supremacy was violently assailed by the Greek Revolution of 1821. The flame, first kindled on the mainland, soon spread to Crete. The Christian inhabitants of the island rose against their oppressors, drove the Mahometans into the fortresses, and there blockaded them so strictly that they were reduced to great straits by want of provisions. Turkey was in no position to despatch powerful reinforcements to her army in Crete, and for the first time since its conquest the island stood almost free—its inhabitants armed and desperate, its oppressors enfeebled and distressed. The insurgents had not the means of besieging the fortresses, though they closely blockaded them by land; and as the Turks were able to throw in supplies by sea they still retained a hold upon the island. But it was a more equal struggle than that which has occurred in our own time, for Turkey was not then supplied with English-built war steamers sailed under English guidance. She could not then establish a blockade of Crete so strict and exhausting as that of 1867-8. She established, in fact, scarcely any blockade at all, for her hands were full of other work just then, and the swift-sailing Hydriote brigs could easily outmanœuvre her clumsy frigates. I have heard old men describe the ease with which communications with the outer world were kept up in those days, and speak regretfully of the busy trade in certain secluded bays, where quite a fleet of small craft would be seen at anchor when the wind had favoured a voyage from Greece. Italian vessels, also, would put in to the coast of Crete, to do a profitable though risky business in native products, which were exchanged for various foreign supplies. Nor were the Ionian Islanders wanting in this kind of enterprise: and many a cargo was brought by them to the extemporised markets in quiet nooks upon the shore of Crete.

But though the unhappy island had almost shaken itself free, and though the intervention of England, France, and Russia had destroyed the Turko-Egyptian fleet at Navarino, it was destined that the Cretans should be handed back to another period of servitude. Less fortunate than their kindred of the present kingdom of Greece, the Cretans were shut out on the wrong side of the arbitrary line by which that kingdom

was limited. All the bloodshed of the struggle they had made to gain their liberty, all the sacrifices they had endured, went for nothing. The European diplomatists who had taken the matter in hand, were afraid of making Greece too strong—a ridiculous fear, which has ended in making her far too weak for satisfactory progress—and instead of rounding off the Greek kingdom with Thessaly, Epirus, and Crete, they restored these three provinces to Mahometan rule. It is a proof of the political foresight of the late King Leopold of Belgium, that, when offered the throne of Greece and somewhat inclined to accept it, he stipulated, as an indispensable condition, that Thessaly, Crete, and Epirus should be added to the kingdom which it was proposed to erect. Alas! for the Cretans, who were thus calmly consigned to another half century of benighted despotism and to all the cruel uncertainties which still shroud their future. The tyrant's hold upon the island had become so weak that a word from the Western Powers would have detached it for ever from his Empire. Driven into their fortresses, pressed by famine and enfeebled by disease, the Turks would have capitulated at the first demonstration against them of European war-ships. Crete might have been quietly joined to Greece, and would have caused from that moment no more trouble to foreign diplomacy than has the Morea, or Attica, or any other part of the Hellenic kingdom.

As to the Cretan Turks, they would, no doubt, have suffered the loss of their invidious privileges by being received within the pale of civilised Europe. As subjects of King Otho, they could no longer have lorded it over their Christian neighbours. We may even admit that they would have stood at a disadvantage, politically speaking, for some few years, and would have had to sing very small where once they helped to rule the roost; but they would have escaped from the Pashas, and been free to profit by the improved condition of their country. They were often petty tyrants among the Christians, it is true, and had whatever pleasure that fact might give them; but they were almost as often made to feel the weight of authority themselves when they happened in any way to provoke their alien governors from Stamboul. Thus it would have been an advantage even to the Cretan Turks to be annexed to Greece. They would have settled down into peaceable citizens of a constitutional state, as have the Mahometan Greeks who remained in Greece after its emancipation. Above all things, they would have avoided the being put forward more and more as the champions of a detested rule, and made to sacrifice themselves, when occasion arose, on behalf of Mahometan ascendency. It is difficult to ascertain the exact proportion of the Christians to the Mussulmans in Crete, for efforts have been made by the advocates of Turkey to exaggerate the importance of the Mussulman minority. The probable proportion, from the most reliable data, is that of five or six

Cretan Christians to one Cretan Turk, or say in round numbers about 220,000 Christians and 40,000 Turks. There cannot be anything like an equality of numbers between them, it is certain ; whilst the utter inability of the Cretan Turks to make head against the Christian insurgents, without the support of regular troops, suggests a doubt whether even the number which I have given as most probable does not exaggerate the strength of the True Believers in the island. We must remember that, besides being better armed and full of martial confidence, the Cretan Turks are all on the side of authority, and that the Christians, though they have ventured much and suffered heavily, have never succeeded in effecting a levy *en masse* against the Government. If, then, we take my suggestion as rather within the mark, there would have been a minority of less than a sixth of the inhabitants of the island to be politically assimilated ; and when Greece became a Constitutional Kingdom the Mussulmans of Crete would have been powerless for mischief.

It was not merely that the European Powers failed to do their duty by the Cretans at the end of the war of the Greek Revolution. They failed also to give Greece a fair chance in her new career. The little kingdom, shorn of its natural proportions, was exposed to the danger of a lurking ambition of further extension, which could not but disturb men's minds in future years. As Greece became more prosperous and civilised, her people were certain to look, with longing, upon those kindred provinces still held in bondage. The provinces, on the other hand, were tempted by the sight of the comparative progress which Greece had made. Whilst the smoking ruins which the Turks and Egyptians left behind them were rising into busy modern towns and the damages of the war were being steadily made good by the independent Greeks—whilst population increased, and schools were opened in every village—the subjected Greeks remained in dismal servitude. Thessaly, Epirus, and Crete were doomed, by the selfishness and incapacity of Western statesmen, to give the Turks a further opportunity of characteristic misgovernment. No wonder that the Turkish provincials looked with envy and with hope to the Hellenic kingdom. Strange as some of our slow-going Conservatives may think it, it is, nevertheless, perfectly true, that a weak poverty-stricken realm, as Greece seems to us, can be regarded as almost a land of promise, from the standpoint of an oppressed Rayah. Greece had not wealth or power, in our sense of those words, but she was free from the intolerable yoke of the Turks. She had a National Assembly, and a national press—her flag was recognised on the seas, and her villagers could hold up their heads, as men who had neither insult nor brutality to fear on account of their religion. This is why the provincials looked to Greece for sympathy and help. There is no need to invent stories of deep-laid plots and of a wide-spread political propaganda. The

most formidable engines which the Greeks employed against Turkey, in the thirty years which succeeded their liberation, were the school and the printing-press. The most dangerous thing possible to the perpetuity of Turkish rule in the Hellenic provinces was the development of a national feeling among the luckless provincials. Every trader who came among them, with experiences of independent Greece, helped to spread the idea of national unity. Every young doctor who had studied at Athens and who afterwards settled in Turkey, was, more or less, a political emissary, though he might not know it. The Powers when they established Greece had gone too far, if their wish was to bolster up what remained of Turkey in Europe to the end of time, and had not gone far enough to make the Hellenic race content and united.

In one sense Crete was freed from the Turks at the end of the war of the Greek Revolution. The island was handed over to Ali Pasha of Egypt, and received its Governors for several years from Cairo instead of from Constantinople. But the condition of the people was far from improving under their Egyptian taskmasters ; and the only peculiarity of the new system was, that Mussulmans as well as Christians were now suspected of treason, being no longer bound by their religious prejudices to support their actual sovereign. Several hundred prominent men of both religions were executed, with impartial ferocity, in 1835, on the rumour of an intended rising ; and it seemed as if their brotherhood in misfortune might give the jarring creeds some ground of political sympathy. The Egyptian rule in Crete came, however, to a sudden end. Ali Pasha's victorious attack upon his master the Sultan, led to the Treaty of London and to the intervention of the Four Powers. The Egyptians lost Crete and Syria ; Turkey was once more rehabilitated, and the Cretans found themselves back again under their ancient oppressors. They were governed much in the old way, despite the publication of the Hatt-i-sherif and the Hatt-i-houmayoun. It was very well to say that all religions were tolerated, and to declare, by Imperial Decree, that Christian and Turk should be on the same footing in the eye of the law—a Cretan who had tried to assert his equality would soon have found that theory and practice were different things. Whatever the foreign public might be told, it was not intended by those in power in the provinces that Turkish reform should be more than skin deep. The dilemma may be briefly stated thus. A Pasha sent to govern a province looked upon it as an orange to be squeezed. To squeeze the orange it must be firmly held ; to hold it firmly the local Mussulmans must be kept in tolerably good humour ; disagreeable incidents must be hushed up, and troublesome complainants be sent about their business. Therefore the Christians could not be encouraged to complain and the Mussulmans could not be checked in any overbearing or tyrannical acts. Add to this, that

Crete enjoyed the full benefit of the clumsy Turkish method of collecting taxes, with its grievous exactions by the tax-gatherers, and you have a state of things sufficiently uncomfortable. If a Cretan Christian suffered any outrage or injury from a Turk it was almost impossible to bring the offender to justice. The judges of the Superior Courts in the island were foreigners, speaking a foreign language. The law which they professed to administer was the law of the Koran. A Christian's oath could not be received on the more solemn occasions of judicial decision, and even where it was received it would not be permitted to weigh for a moment against that of a True Believer. Well might the Cretans sigh for deliverance from their hard lot, and be willing to run some risks rather than continue in bondage.

From the time of the exchange of Turkish for Egyptian rule in Crete, in 1840, until the outbreak of the insurrection in 1866, there was only one attempt at a rising against the Turks, under a certain Hadji Michalis, which failed without attaining very formidable proportions. The people were not content. How could they be? But they were not sufficiently desperate to stake their all upon the doubtful issue of a struggle against Turkish power, without some hope of outside help. Nearly twenty years passed away after Hadji Michalis had failed to rouse the Island, before circumstances were ripe for another attempt. During these years the Turks were as objectionable as ever, in matters of fact, though in theory they had promised good treatment to all. It was vain to gloss over the real state of things by smooth phrases about reform, whilst the dominant class was becoming more and more insolent, and the tax-gatherer more and more extortionate. The very attempt to civilise Turkey, by giving her a national debt and a fleet of steamers, made matters worse in the outlying provinces. Money was so urgently needed at head-quarters that the screw was put on with increasing severity; until the tax-payers could hardly get a livelihood out of their land. If the people complained to their Government, as the Cretans did in 1858, in the form of a humble petition of grievances, they were put off with the empty promise that everything should be set right; and matters went on just as before. If the people remained doggedly silent, bearing what they had to bear, for fear of worse evils that might come upon them in case of resistance, it was declared, by sympathisers with the Turks, that everybody was happy and prosperous. So the growing discontent on one side, and the angry suspicion on the other, became more irreconcilable as years went by. The promises of 1858 remained unfulfilled, as regarded substantial reforms, whilst a weak though well-meaning Governor, Ismail Pasha, put forward his plans for improving agriculture, and even set about opening schools in some of the villages, for the instruction of young Cretans. He came too late to check the current of events, though he deserves some credit for his personal efforts at conciliation. The

truth was that the Cretans had become almost desperate enough for war, and a very little outside encouragement was all that was needed to make them take the plunge.

When the Cretan chiefs met at Omalo in May, 1866, to consider their grievances and to petition the Porte for redress, there was much to encourage them in the political situation of Greece. Some four years previously, a revolution, as sudden as it was bloodless, had driven King Otho into exile, and Prince George of Denmark had mounted the Greek throne amid the acclamations of the people. There was a feeling that the old policy of caution and timidity might be thrown aside now that the conservative influence of Austria had received so severe a check. Many Greeks were sanguine enough to imagine that even England would be more inclined to favour a young monarch allied to her own Royal House, a Protestant in faith and thoroughly Constitutional, than she had been to favour Catholic Otho. Others, who did not go so far as to hope for any active help from England, were encouraged by the evident revival of Russia's strength and by the anxious pre-occupation of Austria in her quarrel with the Prussian Court. It was evidently a favourable moment for the Christians in Turkey, when their arch-enemy, Austria, was occupied elsewhere. I will not stop to discuss the various theories which have been propounded, as to the exact foreign influence which induced the Greeks to encourage the Cretans to make a try for freedom. To those who can see nothing but the hand of Russia in every move on the Eastern chess board, it is useless to offer other explanations; whilst, to more reasonable persons, it may seem an open question whether Bismarck or Napoleon III. was the more likely to have set the ball in motion. My own belief is that the Greeks were not urged on by any foreign Power, but that they gradually drifted into helping the Cretans through earnest sympathy with their cause, and traditional dislike of Turkey, whose cruelties, the elder inhabitants of her some-time province could well remember.

The Cretans did not rise hap-hazard in 1866, on the spur of sudden provocation, but they took the ordinary steps of prudent men who desire redress of grievances, yet shrink from the terrible risks of war. After the chiefs had met at Omalo, a remote spot high up amongst the Western Mountains, and had prepared their petition, there was a period of suspense, during which Ismail Pasha tried to persuade the malcontents to accept his assurance that matters should be set straight some day, if only time were allowed to the Porte to carry out its magnanimous intentions. But the Cretans had had enough of empty promises, and maintained their threatening attitude whilst their petition was on its way to Constantinople. It is said that arms were distributed among the Christian villages, by some of the principal chiefs, who had managed to obtain a supply from abroad. Others

declare that a certain number of old-fashioned flint-lock pieces had long been hidden in the island, even from the time of the Greek Revolution, and that very few rifles of modern make were possessed by the Cretans until later in the year, when blockade runners began to arrive from Greece. Certain it is, that the Christian part of the people was very poorly armed, whole villages being often without a single fire-lock; and that, had not the men of the mountains been better prepared than their kindred of the plains, an attempt at insurrection would scarcely have been possible. The Turks, however, who knew that their Government was certain to try what terrorism could do before they made any concession, thought it well to withdraw the outlying Mussulman inhabitants to the shelter of the fortresses. Such a measure, not unreasonable in itself, caused serious alarm to the Christian villagers, who well knew what it portended. Now that the Moslem families were safe from reprisals, it would be all the easier for those in power, to organise bands of Cretan Turks to serve as guides to the regular troops. This calling in of True Believers to the safety of their ramparts, was an ominous precaution, which boded ill for what was next to come.

In the middle of the summer of 1866, measures were taken to disarm the Christians, and a detachment of troops which came to seize the National Committee was fired upon by the people. This was like applying a torch to a powder magazine. The angry Turks treated those insurgents whom they could catch with great brutality. Villages were plundered, women were outraged, and many wounded Cretans were hacked to pieces by the yataghans of their Moslem neighbours. The insurgents, on the other hand, took vigorous measures to avenge these attacks. Many a stalwart Moslem was struck down by the unerring bullets of the hardy and patient mountaineers. It became a service of danger to go up country on foraging expeditions, and the Turkish Governor called loudly for reinforcements. At first the Porte had been incredulous of active resistance, treating the whole matter with its usual lazy indifference; but when the news arrived of actual fighting in Crete, there was a sudden outburst of rage and energy among the ruling Pashas. The Christian dogs, who were not content with promises, who dared to resent murder and violation, and to ask reforms in a threatening way, must be promptly suppressed. So stern old Mustapha, a man who had taken part in the war of the Greek Revolution and who had had many a rough bout with the Cretan mountaineers, was sent to replace his son-in-law Ismail, and several battalions of Turkish regulars were despatched in hot haste to the scene of action. Just in proportion, however, to the increased efforts of the Porte was the increasing stream of volunteers and munitions of war which flowed from Greece to the insurgent camp. All the restless spirits of the kingdom were

burning to strike a blow for so holy a cause. Many lads quite inexperienced in military matters, forced themselves into the volunteer bands, fancying that, once on Cretan soil, they should know how to fight by instinct. Many others, who knew only too much of rough and desperate ways, sought this occasion of getting out of reach of the authorities at home. There were some Garibaldian volunteers in the motley throng, and several officers of experience who had served in the Greek army—among them, notably, Zimbrakaki, Coroneos, and Leonidas Petropoulaki. Then, too, there was that grand old figure Demetrius Petropoulaki, a hero of the Greek Revolution, who, though bowed by age and wounds, was full of fiery zeal against his traditional foes. It may be roughly estimated that, during the autumn of 1866, the insurgents received an accession to their strength of more than fifteen hundred men in the shape of volunteers from Greece, including nearly a hundred foreigners, Garibaldians and others, who cast in their lot with the Greeks. During the same period the Turks received reinforcements of regulars and irregulars amounting to nearly twenty thousand men; so that the balance of physical force was steadily on their side. They could not, it is true, put down the insurrection, but they could, and did, ravage the country far and near; making long skirmishing expeditions to burn this or that village, opposed by the Cretans every inch of the way with a scattered fire of concealed riflemen, and pursued by the same active enemy during their return to the fortresses.

Much stress has been laid, in some quarters, on the help which the Greek volunteers gave to the Cretan insurgents. It has even been asserted that the insurrection owed its force to these irrepressible outsiders. Nothing could be more untrue. The insurrection was the result of Turkish misgovernment, and owed its force to the cruel measures of repression which made thousands of people homeless and desperate. Then, too, there was utter want of faith in Turkish promises—a want of faith which every page of Turkish history amply justifies. The Cretans who struggled so hard against overwhelming odds knew very well by past experience what promises of good government would practically amount to. They were not, like the blinded Turcophiles of Western Europe, living in a world of romance, with the Thousand and One Nights as their nearest approach to actual life, and with a fatal facility for high-class constitution-mongering. To a Cretan insurgent the Turk lacked that poetical gloss with which his Western admirers are apt to endow him. He was merely a stern and cruel master, who might be killed or driven away, but who could not be converted to civilised practices. I have heard it denied that the Turk has ever had a fair chance in Europe. What, in the name of common sense, does this mean? Are not his four centuries of sterile domination an example of as fair a chance as was ever thrown away

by ignorant brutality? He has had only too much chance, and those who know him best can best appreciate how completely he has failed. We seldom get a confession of his past misdeeds except in way of promises for the future, but these promises of amendment are the most telling confessions that could possibly be made. What should we think in private life of a penitent who cheerfully promised to leave off picking pockets and beating his grandmother? Yet such is the usual course of Turkish repentance.

During those anxious bustling days of the Cretan insurrection, it was sad to see truth and justice perverted at every step for the tyrant's sake. Keen Europeans watched every phase of the struggle as men might watch the writhings of a victim at the stake, willing to seize upon the slightest word that might betray a less noble character than his martyrdom demanded. Anglo-Turkish diplomatists minimised the gravity of the situation in the interest of their friend the Sultan. Anglo-Turkish consuls were careful to send reports which would be acceptable at head-quarters, whilst the cosmopolite scoundrels of Pera advised the Turks how to put their best foot foremost and make the worse appear the better cause. I am often obliged to ask myself whether such and such a bygone blue-book or grave newspaper article can be other than a humourous farce disguised in official language, when I look back to insurgent Crete as I remember it, and to insurgent Crete as it was fancifully sketched for the benefit of Western Europe. The Turcophiles revelled in damaging disclosures, invented for their behoof, of divided counsels among the insurgents and of shortcomings of the Greek committees. To the Turcophile imagination Crete was a happy contented island, loving the Sultan above all things, and troubled by a horde of half a million Greek volunteers, who, despite their ferocity, never succeeded in causing any real disturbance. Now the fact was that there existed as real and as determined an insurrection as could be desired by the most zealous anti-Turk. Thousands of the Sultan's soldiery perished in fair stand-up fighting on the mountain sides, and thousands more were carried back wounded to the fortresses. A National Assembly, which represented an immense majority of Cretans, held meetings openly in the up country, with which meetings no Turk dared to meddle, and a stranger who had proper passes from the national authorities could go from end to end of the island without asking the Sultan's leave or fearing his displeasure. For these things I can vouch as an eye-witness, and I may repeat, lest my words should be misunderstood, that by far the larger proportion of the physical force which resisted Turkish rule consisted of native Cretan mountaineers, helped and encouraged, to some extent, by sympathisers from the Hellenic kingdom.

But why did not the movement succeed when it was so popular

and so determined? The explanation is very simple—Turkey was too strong for it. Corrupt and degraded as is her political system, she has brave soldiers to do the Sultan's bidding and plentiful resources in the workshops of Europe to supply her troops with arms. Truly she has had her full share of outside assistance. The money markets of Europe were then open to her, and she could coax the Western public out of its spare cash with marvellous facility. She had an English-built navy to chase the blockade-runners, and skilful English mercenaries to direct her operations by sea. The cut-throat work on shore was done by men armed with English rifles, under the command of an Austrian renegade; so the less the Turcophiles say about outside help, in this matter of the Cretan insurrection, the better. It was a pitiful instance of barbarism armed with civilised weapons without having adopted one civilised sentiment. I have seen the old flint-lock musket used by the Cretans in the earlier part of the insurrection, when the well-equipped battalions of Turks were again and again repulsed by ragged, starving men, whose houseless families cowered upon the hill-side behind them while the battle raged, and whose once pleasant villages sent up clouds of smoke to the clear Cretan sky. I have seen these things, and shall never forget them; but it would take me too long to dwell upon the details of the struggle, so I must pass on to speak of its general result.

Lord Stanley's objection to aid the Cretans,* even indirectly, in bearing the troubles that had come upon them, was logical from the point of view which our Conservative Ministry chose to adopt. If the Cretans were to be left to their fate, it was, perhaps, better to starve them out at once than to prolong their sufferings by saving the non-combatants from immediate danger. But I suppose that some of the Powers were inclined to give Crete a better position, and that Russian diplomacy would have taken a more decided stand in their favour had not France and Prussia patched up their quarrel about Luxembourg in 1867. Be this as it may, the fact remains, that when Crete had made her protest—a protest of tears and blood—and when Turkey had successfully resisted every suggestion of inquiry into her government of the island, there was little to be done but to return to the old state of things, more or less disguised. Sooner or later the insurrection must be starved out, and Greece alone, whatever she

* I have purposely abstained from entering at length into the vexed question of how far it was wise or unwise of foreign powers to carry away the Cretan refugees, to Greece on board ships of war, whilst they did not, in any other respect, help the Cretans. Lord Stanley discouraged this limited sort of intervention, after the first English shipload had been taken, by Captain Pym, of H.M.S. *Assurance*. But Russians and other foreigners persisted in helping the refugees to escape from the Turks, until about 50,000 people were said to have reached Greece; a very heavy burden, most generously borne by the Greek Government and nation.

might do in blockade-running, was not strong enough for a single-handed contest with Turkey. The best that could happen was to reap as abundant a crop of Turkish promises as possible, in the hope that some of them might be kept, and to pacify the unfortunate islanders under the shadow of a sham constitution.

In the middle of the summer of 1867, when Omar Pasha had been beaten to a standstill by the Sphakiote mountaineers and when his lying bulletins were announcing the complete submission of the island, Ali Pasha, the Grand Vizier, went on an important journey to Crete. His Excellency was considered a reforming Turk, he had ideas much in advance of those of most of his countrymen, spoke French fluently, and saw the necessity of concealing the iron hand with a velvet glove. Massacres might be all very well as warnings to the refractory, and village-burning might keep the Bashi-Bazouks in good humour. But such vigorous measures would not bring in revenue so well as more common-place oppression. Olive trees once cut down are slow to be replaced, and a country quite depeopled might prove a worthless possession, unless its indolent masters would turn to and work for themselves. So, having failed to terrorize Crete out of hand, the Turks were now bent on giving the island a constitution. Was not the Sultan at that time hob-nobbing with Western potentates, and are not constitutions a speciality of the West? Of course there must be no real change, for that would make the possession of Crete useless to Turkey, at least from the blood-sucking point of view. But there must be a constitution to throw dust in the eyes of the Franks. Lord Stanley had made it clearly understood that he thought this giving of a constitution a desirable form of settlement. He intended it to be genuine in character though limited in its scope, and hoped much from the example of the Lebanon. But his lordship forgot that in the Lebanon there was direct foreign intervention. Foreign soldiers were landed upon the coast, Turkish malefactors were openly punished for their misdeeds, and the ruling caste had a lesson which has lasted it in that quarter for more than sixteen years. With Crete the case was very different. No foreign intervention was attempted, no guarantees were obtained beyond empty promises, and all the while that Ali Pasha was negotiating, Omar Pasha was tightening his grip upon the island. He could not conquer it as easily as had been expected, or justify the reports of Turkish victory busily circulated in London and Paris during the summer of 1867. But he prepared a plan of the campaign, which his successor, Hussein Avni Pasha, was to carry on against the insurgents, and he infused new energy into the Turkish military administration. Roads were to be made and chains of block-houses formed across the island, so that the insurrection might be utterly hemmed in. Additional cruisers—the swiftest that could be purchased in England—were to chase the Greek blockade-runners. Everything, in short,

was to be done to compel submission by force of arms and make those who had resisted pass under the yoke once more, whilst Ali's cunningly devised plan of a constitution reconciled European Governments to abandoning the Cretans to their fate.

There was an armistice during the autumn of 1867, and, by hook or by crook, another "National Assembly" was got together under Turkish auspices. The details of its election are almost farcical in their barefaced roguery. The members were simply government nominees, the Mahometans doing as they were bid with stolid indifference, the Christians literally compelled to come in fear of their lives, and having no more of a representative character than would a lot of passers-by, caught hap-hazard in Portsmouth and Southampton, have a representative character for Hampshire. To this "bogus" Parliament, Ali Pasha made known the benevolent intentions of his master, and the "deputies" listened in respectful silence and accepted what they were told as they would have accepted any other order from the superior authorities. But as to debates and legislation, or even petitions of grievances, those were things to be prudently postponed to a very remote future. There was no idea, on the part of Ali Pasha or any one else at Constantinople, of giving the Cretans political power, and they did not know enough of constitutional forms in the island to be amused by playing at local self-government. The great facts of the situation were the strongly reinforced Turkish army, the increasingly vigilant Turkish marine, and the lengthening chain of block-houses which made resistance more difficult to the mountaineers. Those were the palmy days of Turkish officialism, when a certain aroma of barbaric simplicity still clung to the Frenchified Osmanli. His ancestors had been strong enough to speak the truth in their savage fashion, and though Turkey had now become weak and deceptive he could still obtain a readier belief for his fallacious statements than could Greeks or Armenians, who had not the honour to wear the Sultan's uniform. If these latter happened to be in Turkish employ, they were, oddly enough, endowed by Europe with a certain credibility, perhaps because they were then serving against their own race and religion. Anything so rude as official inquiries upon the spot, conducted by responsible Europeans, was not to be thought of in 1867-8. Turkey did not wish it, and her feelings must be respected. Therefore Lord Stanley was obliged to be content with what our ambassador at Constantinople told him of the liberal declarations of Fuad Pasha or Ali Pasha, with no further guarantee of Turkish good faith than our being in the nineteenth century, instead of the fifteenth, and the Sultan's having tasted champagne at the Crystal Palace. There were plenty of consular reports, I may be told, and plenty of Greek complaints against the Turks to balance the Ottomans' praise of themselves. But these things form no guarantee such as might have resulted from

a formal commission of inquiry. There was no outside European, superior to local influences, responsible for seeing the new constitution fairly started. Turkey had promised quite enough to make a very important change in the condition of the Cretans, if only her promises had been brought to book. I need not dwell on the various good things contained in Ali Pasha's constitution, because my contention is that those good things have been quite illusory with regard to every-day life. The General Assembly for the island, the district assemblies presided over by Christians, the mixed tribunals with their elective judges, are alike creatures of Turkish phantasy. The courts of arbitration have yet to be seen at work, and the Christian inhabitants have yet to find that they can get protection from the law when Turkish interests stand in the way.

After the armistice had expired hostilities were renewed in a desultory fashion, the Turks being much more cautious than formerly, and the insurgents having somewhat lost heart through the protracted hardships of a second winter campaign. Ali Pasha, the "pacificator" of the island, had returned in triumph to Stamboul, so had Omar Pasha, the Serdar Ekrem, leaving his lieutenant, Hussein Avni Pasha, to fight it out with the pacified Cretans. Month by month the block-houses were advanced, month by month the resources of the Greek committees became more attenuated, and the burden of supporting the Cretan refugees was more felt in Greece, as time wore on without bringing any advantage to the good cause. It became evident that Europe would not go behind the sham constitution, and that, without European intervention, the Turks must ultimately win. I visited Crete again in 1868, and found the National Assembly of the insurgents much discouraged by the progress of events. They were still masters of the interior of the island, but were harassed by the necessity of watching the Turkish block-houses, were more closely shut in by sea, and found their supply of ammunition running very short. It was a quiet time in Crete, compared with the fierce and bloody struggle a year before. The refugees had been shipped off in such numbers that there were no longer encampments of starving women and children on the mountain sides. The Greek volunteers were reduced to a few hundred men stationed in the neighbourhood of Candia; and as to the Turkish troops, they had completely changed their tactics since the erection of Ali Pasha's constitution, behind which they could play a waiting game. Instead of headlong attacks upon any and every position occupied by the insurgents, there were now only cautious attempts to hamper them and shut them in. One might travel far and wide over the mountains, but those chains of block-houses in the valleys made it constantly more difficult to avoid running the gauntlet of a Turkish fusillade at certain points on the road. When I ran the blockade for the last time in the autumn of 1868, and saw the Cretan mountains fade out of sight behind

me, it was clear to my mind that without foreign intervention the insurrection could not last much longer. The Cretans had thoroughly proved that they were in earnest, if braving death and ruin can prove anything. They had made a wonderfully good fight of it, considering their early disadvantages, and had brought Turkey to grant them a constitution, little as it might be worth. But they could not, unaided by Europe, achieve complete independence, or that union with Greece which they desired even more. There was nothing for it, but to submit to the Turks, to accept such terms as they would grant, and make the best of a bad bargain. By the end of 1868 the insurrection was suppressed, the remaining bands of volunteers, with a force just arrived, at the eleventh hour, from Greece, were obliged to capitulate to Hussein Avni Pasha, and Turkish authority was completely re-established throughout Crete.

Cruel and violent as the Turks had been during their contest with the Cretan insurgents, it is only fair to them to state, that they committed fewer excesses after their pacification of the island than might have been expected. The reason for this moderation is not far to seek. It was the cue of those in power at Constantinople to be moderate in victory, for, had they not kept Europe from interfering by their gift of a constitution to Crete, and were not the eyes of Europe still fixed curiously upon the island? At the outset of their struggle with the Cretans the Turkish authorities had been inclined toward what we should now call a Bulgarian policy. They let their Bashi-Bazouks make an example of the rebels, and tried to strike terror into all who opposed them. But when Crete finally submitted to her fate in the end of 1868, another policy had been adopted by her conquerors. Things were to be smoothed over as much as possible, and Europe was not to be shocked by further cruelties. Therefore, the Turks, both regulars and irregulars, were kept tolerably well in hand—a matter not difficult when their chiefs really mean it, for have they not unlimited power over the men? Crete was conquered and slid back into her old state of subjection. She had made her protest against an unendurable tyranny, and had made it in vain, save that a plausible constitution was granted her, as above described. How much it was worth may best be gathered from the subsequent complaints of the people and promises of the Porte. An assembly in which the large Christian majority has no more representatives than the small Mahometan minority, and in which the casting vote is always with a zealous Turk, would not be likely to do much in way of reform. But I venture to assert that it has done nothing. It has been a mere pretence, simply kept up to deceive statesmen like Lord Derby, who, whilst honestly desiring to see the Cretans better governed, have not been prepared to exact the necessary guarantees for better government. Without some foreign pressure of a constant

and practical kind it is impossible to secure Parliamentary privileges to the Christian subjects of the Porte. You may paint your constitutional picture an inch thick and combine the colours of every political party to make it seem more liberal; but, underneath it all, there is still the dominant Turk, who views himself as appointed by Heaven to rule his subject Giaours, and whose real authority rests upon the fanatical support of a swarm of half-civilised Asiatics. So long as this authority is paramount in Crete, the local assembly must of necessity be little better than a sham. Its members can only petition against undoubted grievances at their own personal risk, and its deliberations can amount to nothing more than humbly listening to the suggestions of the Governor-General.

The Cretans were promised remission of taxes, but the taxes have not been remitted. They were promised that the revenue of the island should be spent in some part on local improvements, but the revenue has not any of it been so spent. They were assured of equality before the law for Christian and Mussulman alike, but such equality has as yet remained in the regions of theory and not descended to the realm of fact. Certainly they have good ground of complaint against Turkey, and their case affords a striking example of the futility of a mere paper constitution, imposed by foreign opinion upon a despotic government and unsupported by any substantial guarantees. Would it be too much to hope that the necessity for patching up a rotten empire like Turkey may some day cease, and that the Cretans may be united to their kindred of Greece, with the best of all securities for their political future, in the absolute right to manage their own affairs, to govern for the people and by the people, without even the shadow of dependence upon an Asiatic conqueror, whose predecessors have done their island nothing but harm and whose final departure would be a relief to all concerned?

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